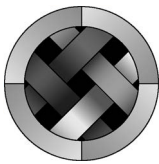
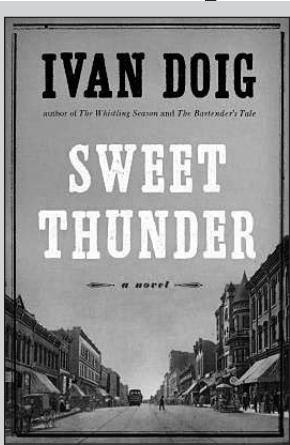


# Ivan Doig: “Alive to language” (from page 1)



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*Sweet Thunder*, set in Butte, is Ivan Doig’s latest re-release. A new book by the Governor’s Arts Award winner, *Last Bus to Wisdom*, will be published in August.

Lois Welch, a longtime family friend, described Doig as “alive to language,” a trait that drew him toward fiction from his original career as a journalist.

“He talks about words as though you could just put them in your hand and pet them,” said Welch, a retired University of Montana English professor.

**Doig was born** in 1939 and raised on the Rocky Mountain Front.

He worked as a ranch hand before earning his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in journalism from Northwestern University and his doctorate in history from the University of Washington.

After working in journalism, he transitioned into memoir with *This House of Sky: Landscapes of the Western Mind*.

His recollection of growing up along the Front was a finalist for a National Book Award in 1979.

Missoula-based writer William Kittredge recalled that when *This House of Sky* was released, the literary world “identified a major Montana writer coming right out of the box.”

“It had a lot to do with really opening up ideas about what life was like out here and what it could be like here,” he said.

The success of that book and Doig’s subsequent novels was born of his diligent work ethic in addition to the quality of its prose.

When the book was first released, Kittredge said, Doig loaded up his car with boxes and boxes of copies of his memoir and drove around Montana to small bookstores for signings.

He kept it up over the years, too, building up a fan base that identified with him and his stories.

“People in those towns regarded

him as a friend,” Kittredge said. He’d frequently hear people say, “Ivan’s going to be here soon,” the rare instance of fans referring to a writer by their first name.

Nor was Doig limited to one part of the state in his writings – his novels traversed the western half to central Montana and the far eastern parts of Big Sky Country.

“He covered the state, and he covered it well,” Kittredge said.

In 1984’s *English Creek*, Doig first ventured into Two Medicine country, a re-imagining of his childhood environs that served as the setting for many of his later novels. That book introduced the McCaskill family, and expanded to a trilogy with *Ride with Me*, *Mariah Montana* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*.

*Work Song* and *Sweet Thunder* used Copper King-era Butte as his muse; and *Bartender’s Tale* took inspiration from his childhood.

Those last three books were all written while he was ill, as was his final novel, *Last Bus to Wisdom*, which will be published in August.

**Welch met Doig** and his wife Carol at a conference in 1979, shortly after the publication of *This House of Sky*.

Welch, widow of the Montana literary icon James Welch, said the couples became fast friends.

Carol taught in Seattle, while Lois taught here in Missoula, and both were supporting their writer-husbands, a financial anomaly in American marriages at the time.

“At that point in American culture, about seven percent of women were supporting their husbands,” she said.

Welch remembers Doig as a jovial, natty dresser who loved Scotch and gardening, and always kept a notepad in his shirt pocket. The Doigs made frequent trips to Montana for his book research, a hallmark of his writing and his life.

“That’s what he liked to do best in the world,” she said. “You didn’t find Ivan under

a palm tree, you found him in the archives in Helena.”

When he and Carol came to visit, the two were always conducting research for his books, often waking up early in the morning to head to archives or libraries.

Even when he was out with friends and heard an expression he liked, he’d write it down in one of those notepads, which he would file away at his home.

Carol, who survives him, had a true partnership with Ivan, said Barbara Theroux, a family friend who manages Fact and Fiction bookstore in downtown Missoula.

The two chose not to have children, Welch said, preferring to spend their lives as a pair pursuing their passions.

**Doig continued** drawing acclaim over his busy career.

In 2007, he was honored with the Wallace Stegner Award by the Center for the American West.

He won the Western Literature Association’s Lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award, and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association gave him more accolades than any other author.

Here in Missoula, he drew a thousand people at the gala reading for the Festival of the Book at his last appearance several years ago.

“Montanans truly identified with Ivan and claimed him as their own,” Theroux said.

Doig deeply loved his home state and its history, but lived in Seattle “for the anonymity it gave him as a writer,” Welch said.

... Like many writers, though, the limits of the term “regional author” troubled Doig.

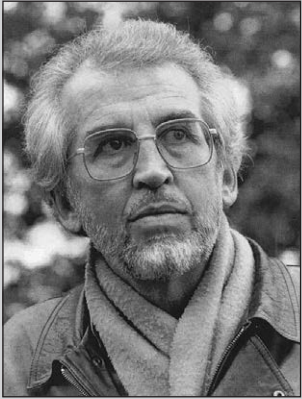
He addressed it in a note to readers on his website:

“One last word about the setting of my work, the American West. I don’t think of myself as a ‘Western writer.’ To me, language – the substance on the page, that poetry under the prose – is the ultimate ‘region,’ the true home, for a writer.”

## CONDOLENCES TO ...

Family and friends of opera singer, producer and teacher **Robert Andrew Hoyem**. He died March 27 from kidney failure at St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula. He was born Sept. 23, 1930, in Lewistown and grew up on his parents’ ranch southwest of Lennep, in the foothills of the Crazy Mountains, and in Thompson Falls. He enrolled at The University of Montana in Missoula in 1949, sang in the Jubileers, performed in operas and other stage productions under his voice teacher, professor John Lester, and graduated in 1953. He pursued advanced studies at the Manhattan School of Music in New York and earned a Fulbright to Germany, where he continued his studies. Hoyem sang as a tenor with various operatic companies in Germany and ultimately moved into stage production, staging more than 40 shows. After three kidney transplants into the early 1990s, he continued his career with voice teaching and returned to Montana in 2003. The University of Montana awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2005, and he continued his voice teaching up to the last few days of his life.

– From the *Missoulian*, April 2



Robert Andrew Hoyem

The friends and family of longtime Bigfork civic leader and environmental policy pioneer **George Darrow**. He died Feb. 25 in Kalispell at age 90. According to the *Daily Inter Lake*, Darrow and his wife, Elna, who died in 2009, were consummate volunteers for decades in the Bigfork community where they owned and operated Kootenai Galleries for many years. He was a driving force behind the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts and led an effort to raise nearly \$1 million for the center in the mid-1980s. “He was a pillar of Bigfork,” said Bruce Solberg, former Bigfork Chamber of Commerce director. “He was always an influential guiding force, there to lend an ear and give really good advice.” The former state legislator, who served in the Senate and House from 1967-’74, also wrote and led the passage of the Montana Environmental Policy Act, landmark legislation that still guides the planning of development projects with a focus on environmental impacts. Sen. Bob Keenan, R-Bigfork, said Darrow was “uncompromisingly passionate” about his promotion of Bigfork as a destination resort village.

– From the *Daily Inter Lake*, Feb. 26

The friends and family of quilter and seamstress **Mary Louise “Mary Lou” (Boyer) Tucker**. She died March 8 in Great Falls. A native of Kentucky, she taught in a one-room schoolhouse near Havre, and worked as an administrative assistant and salesperson in Hamilton and Missoula before pursuing her passion as a quilter at Timeless Quilts in Missoula and Big Sky Quilts in Great Falls.

### Tribute to Arnie Erickson

I am saddened to learn of the passing of Arnie Erickson.

When I was a sophomore at Cut Bank High School, Arnie took the position of choir director and immediately had an impact that, for me personally, was life changing. As our director, the choir was always inspired to do our best for his sake, because we knew how much he cared about the quality of our performances. He ambitiously put on the schedule, for the first time in Cut Bank High’s history, musicals such as “Finian’s Rainbow” and “Brigadoon” that involved almost every musician in Cut Bank, from the singers onstage to the classical musicians in the orchestra pit.

Soon, we all began to form ensembles, and when Larry Epstein, Phil Fox, Lee Freed and I approached him about forming a quartet, there was no time left in his busy schedule to fit us in. Arnie took one look at our long faces and said, “Now wait a minute – how about if we use lunch hour, eat quickly, and rehearse the remainder of the hour,” giving up his personal time for us. Much to our shock, he insisted we sing barbershop quartet arrangements to learn to sing harmonies, before moving on to the songs we wanted to sing.

He always made personal sacrifices for the benefit of his students. Arnie drove us to talent shows in Sunburst, accompanied us on piano for ladies’ luncheons, and when we were ready, prepared us for regional and state music festivals. His enthusiasm for all kinds of music was infectious, and it fostered a love of performing that set me on a lifelong career path. Whenever I saw Arnie in the audience at one of my shows, I would stop in mid-show to recognize him and talk about the influence he had on my life.

As a board member of the Montana Arts Council, I now see how important our music teachers are to the young of our state, what a vital role they fill in developing well-rounded individuals, and when speaking to our Legislature about funding the arts, I always include my story about Arnie.

I know the choir will be singing a special welcome for one of their own as he makes his journey home.

– Rob Quist



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